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Dear President,
Distinguished Representatives
And NGO Representatives,

There is an increasing trend in anti-Muslim sentiment in many OSCE participating States, especially in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2001 and 2005. This trend is now evident in public discourse, including the field of media and politics. Negative portrayals of Muslims, stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims create a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility towards Muslim communities in the territories they are used to live in. This is a serious challenge for many OSCE participating States that they have to manage in their multicultural and multi-faith societies.

While there is an estimated population of 20 million Muslims across the OSCE region, the increasing anti-Muslim sentiment in public and political discourse in many states is a serious concern for the Muslims of Europe. This rising Islamophobia leads the erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms, and religious discrimination and questions over identity and civic belonging are issues of concern in the OSCE region.

Incidences of discrimination have been widespread in many OSCE participating States, including Greece. Increase in hostility and discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobia is manifested in different ways. Violent manifestations of intolerance motivated by hatred against Muslims are perpetrated against individuals, their property or propagated on the Internet.

The discrimination and intolerance against Muslims has recently become ever more prevalent in Greece. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which is the only officially recognized minority by the Greek State, is being threatened and feared by incidents of violence and attacks motivated by hatred. The most recent incident is that the Muslim cemetery in the northern city of Komotini, Greece late on Friday, on 13 August 2010, on the holy day of Ramadan¹²¹(<http://greece.greekreporter.com/2010/08/15/vandals-desecrate-turkish-graves-in-greece/>). Vandals desecrated the Muslim cemetery of Pospos (Poşpoş) and Ifestos (Kalkanca) districts. The unidentified assailants destroyed more than twenty gravestones in the cemetery, and they painted the name of the organization, *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn), which is a Greek nationalist political organization that describes itself as a popular nationalist movement and supports National Socialism.

Safe use of the Internet remains an important problem in dissemination and widespread circulation material motivated by racism, xenophobia, anti-Muslim propaganda, and needs to be balanced in the information society which plays a crucial role in promoting in enhancing citizens' ability to participate fully in democratic processes.

An interesting example to this situation is that Georgios Karatzaferis, President of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), announced his candidacy for the province of Rhodope on 12 September 2009 at a press conference during a visit to the city of Tripoli in Peloponnese, and he stated that "Thus it will not seem like only the Turkish consulate is serving in this area". After Karatzaferis' speech, a placard on which "Remove the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey" is written has been placed in the city center of Komotini. And, a sign petition for the removal of the Turkish Consulate in Western Thrace has been started via the website named www.proxeneio-stop.gr, which is established by the group that placed the placard over the bridge around the city center in Komotini. And the group and the website is supported by a local newspaper, Antifonitist¹, which is an indication that the propaganda on the Internet and the hate speech fuelled by racism and discrimination based on the ethnic origin of the Minority in Western Thrace has been intertwined. The sign petition and the campaign about the removal of the Turkish Consulate in Komotini have had an adverse effect on the Turkish Minority living in the region, and it raised the tension between the minority and the majority which in turn destroys the unity in diversity in the region.

Almost a year after, the Turkish Consulate General in Thessaloniki, a city in the northern part of Greece, was attacked on 12 August 2010, only one day before the desecration of the Muslim cemetery of Pospos and Ifestos. Unknown assailants threw a firebomb at the Consulate General; it did without damage or casualties. The attack happened at 4:15 a.m., and three men wearing motorcycle helmets approached two police guards outside the Turkish consulate building and threatened to burn them and threw a Molotov bomb and ran away. On 18 September 2010, unknown assailant or assailants threw Molotov cocktail outside the Thessaloniki Turkish Consulate General, which is located in the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki. On Saturday night, around 02.30 a.m, unknown assailants threw firebombs to the police post outside the consulate, where Greek police officers are in charge.

Another major issue with regard to internet blogs and forums, there are many examples of such websites which contain very disturbing phrases of hatred attacks. Such websites and its administrators post up subjects which provokes individuals to insult ones beliefs or ethnic origins, examples of such websites can be seeing in Greece which continually target Western Thrace Turkish minority. It is very clear that there are strong bonds and cooperation between the websites, similar topic is posted on a number of forums, meaning that a wider profile of individuals can gain access to such blogs. Forums of that kind can also be found regarding Turkish- Greek relations, most posts are in English and often turns into "heated arguments" as it

is described, which is a polite term used for the insults which is contained within the forums(<http://www.greekalert.com/>). Since such websites appeal to large number of people, they may easily provoke feelings of hatred.

Unfortunately, hate crimes in many OSCE participating states are not or under reported in many participating States, due to the fact that many of them do not collect data on hate crimes consistently at national level including Greece. The Fundamental Rights Agency has noted that the authorities in Greece do not provide any data on hate crimes, although there is slight improvement in the last year. In fact, reporting should not be left only to police agencies, but that NGOs should play a role in monitoring incidents and providing alternative data sources. However, national consultation bodies which would act as a permanent monitoring centre and increase public awareness of the problem of the dissemination of incitement to hatred should be established in OSCE participating states, in full co-operation with non-governmental organizations, including the ones that belong to the minority groups.

The challenge in combating incitement to hatred on the Internet is to find a proper balance between freedom of expression and an effective fight against acts of racist and xenophobic nature. Although national legislation prohibits any acts or activities aiming at racial discrimination with regard to the incitement to hatred and dissemination of racist ideas through any means, it has a limited application in practice in Greece, like most of the OSCE Participating States. And, it should be noted here that Greece has signed but not ratified yet the Additional Protocol to the Convention on cybercrime, concerning the criminalization of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems.

In addressing the phenomenon in the OSCE Participating States, raising awareness of hate on the Internet must be at the root of any coherent strategy to combat hate crimes which are based on racist, xenophobic and anti-Muslim propaganda on the Internet. This should be a part of action plan which sets out a coherent framework for combating hate crimes in all OSCE Participating States. Emphasis should be placed on the need to develop new models and multiply their use across the OSCE region, and to promote the value of diversity and pluralism. In particular, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) should consider paying more attention to hate crimes on the Internet in the annual OSCE hate crime reports in which it should stress the importance of promoting tolerance, mutual respect, dialogue and understanding, including through the Media and the Internet within strategies based on a variety of measures.

The OSCE participating States, including Greece should ensure that relevant national legislation applies also to racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim offences and prosecute those responsible for this kind of offences, and they should encourage continued and increased efforts by NGOs to monitor and their efforts to fight against intolerant discourse among societies they live in. And, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights should pay more and continuing attention to racist incidents and crimes against Muslims in the OSCE area, including Greece and establish a more concrete cooperation mechanism with non-governmental organizations in reporting racism and racist hate crimes they face in countries which they live, which indeed needs organization of an OSCE High Level Conference on Intolerance against Muslims. This would enhance the opportunity to discuss on a working definition of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, which may substantially lead to adopt a specific OSCE Ministerial Decision on measures to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims at the national, regional and international levels.

In this combat against hate on the Internet, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media should be granted a more active role in promoting both freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet and monitoring the national legislation in the Participating States. The Representative

should go further in observing relevant developments in all the Participating States, including early warning when laws or other measures prohibiting speech or crime motivated by hate are enforced in a discriminatory or selective manner for political purposes which can lead to impeding the expression of alternative opinions and views. The Representative should also be in close cooperation with NGOs in monitoring the Internet for hate crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia and anti-Muslim content.